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SUBJECT: DISENGAGEMENT SITUATION REPORT, AUGUST 22, 2005

REF: TEL AVIV 5157

This is a joint message from Embassy Tel Aviv and Consulate General Jerusalem.

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

This message conveys information as of 1700 hours local time.

11. (SBU) Summary: On the eighth day of disengagement, the evacuation of the Gaza Strip settlers concluded without incident. The evacuation proceeded smoothly with little of the protest that marked the evacuations of Kfar Darom or Atzmona. Removal and relocation of agricultural equipment from Gush Katif settlements began today, and demolition of houses is well underway. The GOI's objective is to complete evacuations this week. Israeli security forces are focusing on the upcoming evacuations of the northern West Bank settlements of Homesh and Sa Nur, which are scheduled to begin on Tuesday, August 23. Some 100 infiltrators were arrested on the morning of August 22 after trying to reach Sa Nur and Homesh settlements in the northern West Bank. End Summary.

12. (SBU) SETTLER EVACUATION STATUS

-- Fast-Paced Evacuation: Gabi Golan in the PM's office told Economic Counselor that disengagement operations had gone well, tracking with the GOI's most optimistic scenarios. He suggested that the disengagement would be completed by the end of September. Demolition of houses is well underway, with 100 houses demolished out of 2,000 houses and structures in the Gaza Strip. (Note: Press reports indicated that the demolition of houses continued today in Dugit, Peat Sadeh, Ganei Tal, Shalev, Rafah Yam, and Morag. End note.) Greenhouses that have not been sold are being dismantled. Golan said the Palestinians had been cooperative given the number of people outdoors exposed to attacks during the disengagement.

-- Housing: According to Golan, of the 1,500 families evacuated, 800 are in hotels, 400 are in temporary houses, and 200-300 are in yeshiva dormitories, available until the schools open to students in October. Netzarim settler families plan to move to Ariel College in the West Bank. The GOI is renting 900 houses and building 150 temporary houses which the settlers have an option to rent or buy. In the next few weeks, 650 more temporary housing units will be available, and by the end of September, all evacuees should be out of hotels and into permanent housing. Golan added that the GOI is having difficulty meeting settlers' demands that members of communities all be housed together. About 500 families will arrange for housing without GOI assistance. According to press, 300 people evacuees from Ele Sinai set up an encampment at Yad Mordechai outside of the Gaza Strip, and said they would stay there until the GOI can move them together to a new community. The Director General of the Ministry of Construction and Housing has asked them to speak to him to find a solution to their housing situation.

-- Compensation: Only 150 settlers have received GOI compensation, according to Golan. He estimated that the average compensation award for each family would be around USD 400,000-500,000. Most settlers have yet to submit claims, preferring to wait and see how those who have already filed claims fare. Each family received USD 1,000 against compensation for immediate expenses.

Gaza Strip:

Netzarim: The residents of Netzarim were finishing their prayers and leaving the synagogue at approximately 1600 hours local time. According to press, the settlement's rabbi had asked the police on Sunday night to remove the infiltrators who were planning to obstruct the evacuation today. This is the last settlement in the Gaza Strip to be evacuated, as the IDF completed the evacuations of Atzmona, Dugit, Ele Sinai, Nissanit, Qatif, and Shalev last night.

Neve Dekalim: Fifteen teenage boys infiltrated the settlement this afternoon and threatened to set themselves on fire to protest disengagement.

#### West Bank:

Two IDF divisions and four police divisions moved from the Gaza Strip to the northern West Bank today to prepare for the evacuations that are expected to begin tomorrow in Sa Nur and Homesh. The Palestinian Authority deployed 2,100 police to Janin, Nablus, and Salfit ahead of the evacuations. The IDF announced that several roads in the northern West Bank would be closed to prevent the entrance of more infiltrators in the two settlements, but press reports indicate that the YESHA Council is planning a march from Kedumim to Sa Nur and Homesh around 1700 hours today.

#### 13. (SBU) DEMOLITION UPDATE

-- GOI Ministry of Environment contacts told ESTH Officer Aug 22 that the MOE has a high degree of confidence that asbestos, cooking gas, swimming pool chemicals, pesticides and other hazardous materials are being removed from the evacuated areas. International chief Ori Livne noted that approximately 80 percent of houses have tile roofs that do not/not contain asbestos (e.g., homes with shingles, including those with red roofs, do not/not have asbestos. Other homes are being examined and dealt with accordingly). The separation of hazardous materials is being done by MOD contractors. Though MOE does not have its own people on the scene, it has reviewed procedures and has a high degree of confidence in the contractors, who are licensed in asbestos removal and participated in the destruction of the former IDF base at the Kirya, which involved significant complex removal of hazardous wastes. There are also audit mechanisms in place. The contractors have been applying to MOE for permits to remove asbestos from affected dwellings; later they will have to present deposit receipts to show that they took the asbestos to licensed sites in Israel. Though there could certainly be errors in execution, MOE has confidence that all of the asbestos roofs will be identified and dealt with appropriately. There are additional specific efforts to identify and remove cooking gas and chemicals for swimming pools, and farmers have agreed to remove pesticides. Although MOE personnel are not on the scene, they have given professional guidance to the contractors through MOD on all aspects of hazardous waste removal.

#### 14. (SBU) SECURITY SITUATION

##### Northern West Bank:

On August 22, Gabi Golan in the PM's office advised EconCounselor that about 700 young activists from other West Bank settlements had gathered at Sa Nur to block the scheduled August 23 evacuation there. (Note: Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin provided similar estimates for infiltrators, noting that only two resident families remain in Sa Nur and 20 families in Homesh, according to press reports. End Note.) Golan asserted that sufficiently large numbers of Israeli police and IDF troops would be involved to handle any resistance. He added that MK Ariele Eldad, a retired general (Medical Corps), was at Sa Nur trying to convince the activists to leave peacefully. The IDF announced late on August 21 that the IDF has put in place a number of changes to prevent the entrance of civilians who have not been granted permission into the areas due to be evacuated in the northern West Bank, and to prevent the disruption of the activities of the security forces in the area.

-- Joint IDF/PA Security coordination rooms remain operational in Jenin and Ramallah, according to the UN. Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Mishlev told General Ward August 22 that cooperation with the PA was going very well. He emphasized authorities will continue to control movement and regulate construction in Area C of the northern West Bank following disengagement from four settlements. The GOI will continue to prevent well-digging that could impact the aquifer that is a major source of water for Israel. (Note: There is a mechanism through the bilateral Joint Water Committee to request a permit to construct a new well though permits are seldom granted. End note.)

-- Right-wing settler youth attacked and destroyed an Israeli bulldozer near Kedumim junction at 1900 on August 21, setting it ablaze. The Israeli driver narrowly escaped injury.

-- Arrests: Some 100 infiltrators were arrested on the morning of August 22 after trying to reach Sa Nur and Homesh settlements in the northern West Bank. The IDF arrested 87 Israelis attempting to enter Homesh settlement where infiltrators had already burned down an IDF communications post and punctured tires of an IDF vehicle trying to reach the area, according to Israeli media reports.

##### Gaza Strip:

A senior IDF commander told U.S. personnel that coordination with PA security forces is proceeding very well at all levels. COGAT authorities conveyed a similar assessment to

General Ward.

-- Rocket/Mortar Attacks: IDF reported two mortar attacks overnight: one near Kissufim Crossing and the other near Netzarim. There were no injuries. The UN reported that one mortar was fired at an IDF operations post in Rafah. The IDF returned fire but no injuries were reported.

-- Attack foiled in Gaza: The PA succeeded in foiling an attack originating in Khan Yunis at Israeli targets, according to press reports.

-- Tunnel Collapse: IDF reported that at 2210 hours August 21 a tunnel being dug in the vicinity of Tel Qatifah collapsed, killing one Palestinian and injuring another.

-- Shootings: At 1950 hours, August 21, Palestinian militants fired on an IDF outpost near Khan Yunis, lightly injuring one IDF soldier, according to the IDF. IDF reported another shooting overnight near an IDF outpost in Tel Qatifah. No injuries were reported.

-- Kidnapping: French Channel 3 journalist Mohammad Luoati, seized by gunmen on August 15, was released on August 22.

#### 15. (SBU) PALESTINIAN REACTIONS

A lively debate in Palestinian society continues over what names to give the cities and towns that will be built on the ruins of the settlements. Gaza residents are considering naming the village to be built in Netzarim after Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Yasir Arafat is another whose name is in the mix. The mayor of Rafah made a more practical suggestion that the new places be named after those donors who invest their money to build them.

-- Fatah organized a festival at Sheikh Zayed City in Gaza to celebrate disengagement.

-- Sa'eb Erakat said the Palestinian leadership views with extreme serious the process of transferring settlers from Gaza to the West Bank settlements, according to the Voice of Palestine radio. He reportedly said this required intervention by the Quartet to abort such plans.

#### 16. (SBU) GOI POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

-- The Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee met on August 22. PM Sharon appeared before the Committee for the first time since the beginning of disengagement, and briefed the committee on the IDF operation to evacuate Gush Katif. Vehement disengagement foe MK Effi Eitan said that revenge against Sharon would be political revenge, and that Sharon would be sent back to his farm where could stroke sheep. Vice Premier Peres came to Sharon's defense, criticizing right-wing MKs for their verbal assault on the Prime Minister.

-- The Israeli ministerial committee on disengagement will meet on the afternoon of August 22, and PM Sharon will reportedly seek to obtain updates on housing solutions, school registration, and employment options for evacuees.

-- Justice Minister Livni issued a warning that anyone who tries to disrupt the evacuation of Sa Nur and Homesh will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, according to radio reports.

-- The Cabinet communique of August 21 included PM Sharon's response to Minister Livnat's query regarding the Secretary's remarks regarding post-disengagement moves. In brief, PM Sharon said that "in the Disengagement Plan there is only one stage of disengagement. There is no stage after this one. The next stage in the diplomatic negotiations regards the roadmap, but in order to enter the roadmap, the things I have already stated must take place -- the cessation of terrorism, violence and incitement; dismantling of the terrorist organizations and impounding their weapons; and the carrying out of reforms in the terrorist organizations... There is no second stage in the Disengagement Plan."

#### 17. (SBU) BORDER CROSSINGS/HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

-- West Bank: The IDF has issued an order stopping all Palestinian workers from entering West Bank settlements until further notice, according to UN sources. The order is expected to be reviewed after Sa Nur and Homesh are evacuated.

-- Gaza Coastal Road: The IDF closed the coastal road at 0530 hours August 22 in preparation for the evacuation of Netzarim settlement, according to Palestinian sources. Nevertheless, movement between north and southern Gaza resumed at 0800 hours with the IDF allowing 20 vehicles at a time to move alternately in each directions. PA National Security Forces were responsible for managing the convoys.

-- Erez Crossing and Industrial Zone: According to Gaza

private sector contacts, Erez remains officially closed to Palestinians, but the IDF continues to allow a small number of people to pass based on humanitarian/medical grounds with prior coordination.

-- Rafah Terminal: According to UNRWA, Rafah crossing remains open in both directions.

-- Abu Kholi junction: Re-opened at 2245 hours August 21 and closed at 0500 hours August 22 as scheduled.

-- Karni Terminal: Karni remains open on August 22.

-- Kissufim, the main crossing used to enter Gush Katif and Kfar Darom settlements, remains open only to traffic/persons leaving Gaza. The IDF announced that all media personnel must leave Gaza by 2200 hours, August 22 through Kissufim.

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